Unit .15

Session .01

God Promises A Suffering Servant

Scripture

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

13 See, my servant will be successful; he will be raised
and lifted up and greatly exalted. **14** Just as many were
appalled at you—his appearance was so disfigured
that he did not look like a man, and his form did not
resemble a human being—**15** so he will sprinkle many
nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of him,
for they will see what had not been told them, and they
will understand what they had not heard. **1** Who has
believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm
of the LORD been revealed? **2** He grew up before him
like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground.
He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we
should look at him, no appearance that we should desire
him. **3** He was despised and rejected by men, a man
of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like
someone people turned away from; he was despised, and
we didn't value him. **4** Yet he himself bore our sicknesses,
and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him
stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. **5** But he was
pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our
iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and
we are healed by his wounds. **6** We all went astray like
sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD
has punished him for the iniquity of us all. **7** He was
oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent
before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. **8** He
was taken away because of oppression and judgment;
and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the
land of the living; he was struck because of my people's
rebellion. **9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had
done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully. **10** Yet
the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you
make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will
prolong his days, and by his hand, the LORD's pleasure
will be accomplished. **11** After his anguish, he will see
light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous
servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and
he will receive the mighty as spoil, because he willingly
submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels;
yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf.

Option 1

As a group, brainstorm as many answers as the students can come up with for the following question: "What are some instances where people inflict pain on others for good?" It could be the good of those receiving the pain or the good of the greater population. Students might come up with answers like coaches, parents, doctors, physical therapists, police officers, soldiers, or the like.

Once you've come up with a list, ask students, alone or in small groups, to create skits or drawings showing someone in one of those professions inflicting pain. The skit or drawing should also show how that pain will later bring about good (skits or drawings might have two scenes: one for the pain, one for the pay-off). Let students prep the skits or drawings and then show them.

Today's lesson will look at the particular pain of a Suffering Servant and how it brings about great good. One of those goods will be that all Christians' pain brings about great good for those same Christians.

Option 2

Write on your whiteboard or some other prominent place: "Jesus: Our Victorious Suffering Substitute." Have your kids count off by 3s, then have them stand together by numbers (all the 1s together, the 2s together, and the 3s together). Instruct them that each group is to focus on a single word from that phrase: the 1s will focus on Victorious; the 2s will focus on Suffering, the 3s on Substitute. Their job is to create a picture or a skit depicting a scene showing how Jesus fulfills that one word. They may work on it together (i.e., all the 1s as one big group), or they may work in smaller groups or solo. They can draw a picture, make a skit, or create a "frozen skit" like a scene in a wax museum. The scene could be from the Bible or set in present day. Whatever they do, it should show Jesus as Victorious, Suffering, or Substitute. Give them some time to prep and then show their scenes. Lead into the lesson by saying that each of these three points come together in one glorious Person: the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

TEACHING PLAN

This section of Old Testament Scripture in the book of Isaiah has been a favorite among many throughout the history of the church. While there are tons of signs, pointers, and foreshadows of Jesus all throughout the Old Testament, these sections in Isaiah stand out in their description and mission of God's future Messiah—Jesus!

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:3.

- **What positive descriptions were mentioned in this text? What negative descriptions were mentioned?**

You can almost miss the fact that this passage begins in victory. If you skim quickly enough, your eyes may pick up some of the more negative descriptions, like disfigured, without ever landing on the first stanza that mentions the Servant will be successful. However, we can't seem to reconcile deep suffering with dynamic success; like oil and water, we assume they must be separate.

God knew and understood we would hold this tension, but He sent the Servant—His Son—to bring resolution. Jesus faced rejection, abandonment, mocking, flogging, a blade to His side, and nails to His hands and feet for His eternal glory. In Him, God painted a picture of brokenness and weaved it with ultimate victory.

The Lord started by explaining the Servant's great success in three ways: raised, lifted, and exalted. In other words, fame and fortune would come to the Servant. Even foreign kings would be quiet in respectful silence, consistent with their rising and bowing before the Servant in Isaiah 49:6-7.

Yet this Man would suffer deeply. People would be appalled at the sight of Him. Nevertheless, people will go from being horrified by this Servant to bending a knee before Him. Isaiah 52:14-15 contrasted the Servant's form with what He would accomplish, which was purification of the nations. His punishment would not be for His own sins but for those who would behold Him in faith. It's this pivotal act that would cause knees to bow.

- **Why do people so often reject that suffering can be connected with glory?**
- **How should this prophecy about the Suffering Servant challenge our views about victory and success?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf.

Isaiah 52–53

52:13–53:3. In talking about these events, Isaiah employed the technique of using the past tense to communicate certainties about the suffering of the Messiah, even though the events had not yet occurred. Before listing the various ways Jesus would experience agony on the cross, the first stanza contrasts His final victory with the atrocities of His crucifixion. It is as if the pain of these verses is so horrific that Isaiah wants us to know how the story ends before we begin.

When we read Isaiah 53 today, we see it as referring ultimately to Jesus Christ. However, the original audience would have identified this mysterious "Servant" with God's chosen people—Israel. At other points in this book, Isaiah referred to Israel as God's servant (41:8). But the mystery deepens as we keep reading, and we begin to realize that this particular prophecy's meaning cannot be solely identified with Israel, because Isaiah describes the servant as someone who will die as a substitute for God's people. The Jews of Jesus' day were hoping for a Messiah who would be a king with the power to conquer their enemies. Instead, Isaiah predicted a servant who would be "despised" and "rejected," without "impressive form" and "majesty."

Activity

Bring blank cards or index cards or paper to your session. Colored pencils or markers may also be a good idea. At the end of your session, ask the students to make cards to send to people who are suffering. The cards should use Scripture and ideas from this lesson about the Suffering Servant to give hope and assurance to Christians who are currently in difficult times. The cards should assure the readers of the future victory because of Jesus' victory through suffering. If possible, have the students think of real people to take the cards to. If they can't think of anyone, they could compose a card for themselves for their own future suffering, or you might know of some church members who are suffering. They should try to include some art of the Suffering Servant if possible. Alternative: if students really don't like art, they could also make short videos on their phone to send to others who are suffering, or to post on YouTube or Vimeo for Christian viewers who are suffering. The videos would do well to include invitations to non-Christians who are suffering: if they will entrust themselves and their suffering to Jesus, the great Suffering Servant, He will serve them by turning their suffering for good.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 64, DDG)

Christ as Substitute

At the heart of the atonement is Jesus Christ substituting Himself for sinners as He died on the cross. This truth is seen against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system, which provided a picture of humanity's need for sin to be covered and guilt to be removed by an innocent sacrifice. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Isaiah 53:4-9.

- **Go back through the text and underline every time "our" is used. What is the significance of using this word?**

Despite what many people would think when this prophecy was fulfilled—that the Servant deserved this punishment—we see that an innocent Man would be killed due to "our" rebellion. The repetition of first-person plural pronouns hammers home that the Servant would suffer in our place. Why? Because of our sin. Jesus bore our sicknesses and our pain because they are a result of the curse (Isa. 53:4). God the Father pierced and crushed Him for our transgressions and iniquities so that we could enjoy peace (53:5). Because all people are like wayward sheep deserving of death (53:6; Rom. 3:23), God the Father placed the weight of our wickedness upon Christ. Jesus stood in our place and faced the consequence of sin (2 Cor. 5:21) on our behalf. He was cut off from the land of living because the wages of sin is death (53:8; Rom. 6:23).

- **How do people sometimes minimize the seriousness of sin? How does God's response to sin in Jesus' death help shed light on its true nature?**

As predicted in his introductory stanza, Isaiah concludes his song by describing the Servant's work on our behalf with the exaltation and victory it brings.

Read Isaiah 53:10-12.

In case anyone would falsely believe that these atrocities against the Messiah were accidental, we learn that God not only orchestrated the whole affair, but also that He was pleased to do so. The greater good produced by Jesus' willing substitution far outweighed His agony and pain. Because He was victorious over sin and death, Jesus is exalted over all the earth with a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). In addition to receiving the glory that He clearly earned, we receive atonement and forgiveness that we do not deserve. Because Jesus willingly became an offering for sin (John 10:17-18), God the Father rewards Him.

- **How does the fact that these prophecies were recorded hundreds of years before the birth of Christ strengthen your faith in the reliability of Scripture?**

Though New Testament followers of Jesus did not initially believe that God's Son would need to suffer in these ways (Mark 8:31-34), after the death and resurrection of Jesus, they recognized whom this prophecy truly pointed to. In addition to the obvious parallels between the Gospel accounts and these words, six different New Testament authors apply these verses to Jesus in eight different places (Matt. 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 5:31; Acts 8:32-35; Rom. 10:16; 15:21; 1 Pet. 2:22-24).

How does Jesus' substitution help us? Two phrases demonstrate the monumental impact of Jesus becoming our substitute. First, our peace was on Him (v. 5). This tells us that Jesus' sacrifice restored our peace with God, making a relationship with Him possible. Second, Isaiah says we are healed by His wounds. This "healing" primarily refers to the spiritual restoration and health Christ's substitution makes possible. On the cross Jesus removed the source of our greatest problem by atoning for our sins.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf.

Isaiah 53

7. We see four types of attacks against the Servant in verse 7.

One, Jesus was oppressed. In the Books of Exodus and Isaiah, this word is used to describe taskmasters and overseers—oppressors—treating their slaves and people with cruelty.

Two, He was afflicted. By definition, "affliction" means "something that causes pain or suffering." A man of sorrows doesn't just describe blood and breathlessness but a mental and emotional burden as well.

Three, He was a lamb led to slaughter. Jesus would bare a piece of wood on His back on the road to the cross—innocent yet afflicted, mocked, and spat upon, treated as something below human.

Fourth, He was sheared. The Man who would bear the weight of our rebellion would be stripped of dignity, of life, and of respect. He would do it all to fulfill His purpose—to save a world to a holy God.

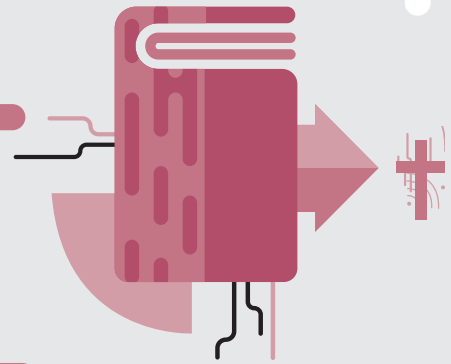
Jesus' death would have been a horror to observe. It was so indecent and uncivilized, escalated by a mob mentality. However, His subjection to death was necessary because of these keywords: "our" and "we."

The Servant, Jesus, knew that His purpose was to be the perfect sacrifice, thus fulfilling a sacrificial system the Israelites had practiced for centuries. All throughout the Old Testament we read about animal sacrifices given to "bear the sins" of the human offender. In fact, there were five main types of sacrifices: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. What messy and laborious work! There had to be a different way, and there was—the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, we tend to forget to meditate on the impact of Jesus' sacrifice by limiting it to Holy Week and Easter. But the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf is a work to behold every day for the rest of our days. A simple prayer we might pray to remember this is: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." This one-sentence petition brings us rightly before the throne of our Almighty God.

(p. 66, DDG) Christ Connection

God opened the eyes of Isaiah to see the coming Savior with detail no one had seen before. Isaiah prophesied about a faithful Servant who would be rejected and despised and yet accomplished salvation through His suffering. The New Testament shows that this prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus and His work.



GOD PROMISES A SUFFERING SERVANT

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

GOD PROMISES A SUFFERING SERVANT

Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf.

JESUS CONNECTION

God gave Isaiah a message to deliver to His people. God promised to send a faithful Servant who would be rejected and despised and yet accomplished salvation through His suffering. The New Testament shows that this prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus and His work.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

SACRIFICE – Giving of myself to help someone else.

HEAD

Isaiah predicted the suffering of the Messiah over 700 years before it happened. According to Isaiah 52 and 53, how would the Messiah be mistreated?

What good came of Jesus' suffering and death?

HEART

Jesus went through extreme suffering and pain in order to be a "successful servant" (Isaiah 52:13). What does that mean?

When God's love fills our hearts, that love makes it possible for us to give up what's important to us for someone else's good. What would it take for you to be a successful servant? Could you give up something you value (time, money, possessions, passions, worldly success) to do something for others? What might that look like?

HANDS

Jesus told His disciples, "No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus gave His life as a willing sacrifice. We admire people who do the same. We love stories and movies about real-life events where someone sacrifices, sometimes even their lives, to save others.

Think of a particular person or an occupation people have that demonstrates this kind of sacrifice. Write a note of appreciation or think of a gesture of appreciation you can do for that person or group. Be sure to send or give it to them.